The Hispanic Community Health Study—Study of Latinos (HCHS-SOL)

It has been well documented that most Hispanic/Latino adults are socioeconomically disadvantaged and have a high prevalence of risk factors that may adversely influence their health. Some data support the notion of a “Hispanic paradox”—namely, that despite high rates of obesity, diabetes, poverty, and lack of access to medical care, Hispanics may have relatively lower all-cause mortality, and cardiovascular morbidity and mortality rates. Recently the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Hispanics live two years longer than non-Hispanic whites, and seven years longer than African Americans.

But Hispanics have not been regularly included in research studies, resulting in large gaps in our knowledge about Latino health. These gaps pose a particular challenge given the changing demographics of our country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population is expected to nearly triple from 46.7 million in 2008 to 132.8 million—30% of the total U.S. population—in 2050.

Because of this rapid growth, it is more important than ever that we understand the factors and health behaviors that protect Hispanics from or increase their risk for chronic diseases.

That is why in 2006, the NHLBI, along with six other institutes, centers, and offices of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), funded the historic, six-and-a-half-year Hispanic Community Health Study—Study of Latinos (HCHS-SOL). This landmark study is the largest longitudinal epidemiological study of health and disease in Latino populations living in the U.S.

For the first time, Latinos are being studied in depth to answer questions such as:
- Do all Latinos suffer the same risk of heart attack, stroke, asthma and COPD?
- Why is it that some Latinos seem to suffer less from cardiovascular disease despite having multiple risk factors?
- What health care access issues are common among Latinos and are they similar across the nation?
- What can we learn about Latino health that will help us create better guidelines for the prevention of disease as well as medical care tailored for them?
- What is the role of cultural beliefs and practices in Latino health? How does adoption of the U.S. lifestyle affect their health?

The HCHS-SOL study was designed to collect baseline comprehensive health data from 16,000 Hispanics from Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Central and South American backgrounds, and follow them over time. The study participants, who are between 18 and 74 years of age, live in four cities: the Bronx (New York), Chicago, Miami, and San Diego.

Enthusiastic staff members across the Field Centers have worked over the last three years in the recruitment and examination of study participants. To date, both recruitment and baseline examination of participants have been completed. Annual follow-up, which will provide information on changes in health and incidence of cardiovascular and pulmonary morbidity and mortality, began in 2009. Final baseline cross-sectional data analyses are expected soon.